Teaching civic engagement

Evaluating an integrative service-learning program

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Violence in America, especially in American cities, has risen to such an extent that it has become a public health issue (Satcher 1995). Research has specifically noted a strong relationship between urban poverty and violence for youth of colour (Kovandzic, Vieraitis & Yeisley 1998; Martinez 1996). Violence in American cities is also a social justice issue, and one that the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (1997) explicitly directs social workers to confront.

From an educational perspective, pedagogical approaches to teaching civic engagement (Underwood et al. 2000), social justice (Adams 1997; Astin & Sax 1998), diversity (Boyle-Baise 2002) and macro social work practice (Cooks & Scharrer 2006) through the use of service-learning have shown great promise. This article describes the process of and the empirical results stemming from a service-learning intervention program that was conducted as part of an advanced community practice class for Master of Social Work (MSW) graduate students. Service-learning activities targeted community capacity-building efforts begun in response to the growing frustration and concern about violence directed at and perpetrated by youth in an urban setting (McKnight & Block 2010). The student work joined an effort called 'You Bet I Told' aimed at challenging the 'no snitch' street culture that was depriving victim families of justice in relation to the violence. The issues presented by the service in the community related well to course learning objectives such as developing social work practice skills in civic engagement, social justice, diversity, and ethics. This article seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of using service-learning to both teach macro social work course content and build community capacity by using a mixed-method data analysis design. Empirical analysis of qualitative data from student reflection papers and quantitative analysis of course evaluations have been employed to demonstrate support for the use of a service-learning approach to teaching macro content. Implications for the use of service-learning as a teaching approach conclude the article.

RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Youth and Violence

American communities have an enduring and growing problem related to violence perpetrated by and against youth (Hawkins et al. 2000). There is therefore a need to make inroads into violence-related behaviours that detract from the overall quality of urban life (Kinnevy & Broddie 2001). Many American cities are beset by the compounding forces of poverty, high school drop-out rates, unemployment, shrinking supplies of affordable housing and a culture that supports a 'no snitching' rule related to violence (McCart et al. 2007). In many parts of the US, states and cities are wrestling with ways to provide meaningful connections with youths and families that are struggling with the economy and violence in their neighborhoods (Nissen, Merrigan & Kraft 2005).

National data tracking high-risk youth reflect that these youth face multiple factors that seem to compound on each other to create this profile defined as 'at-risk' (Children's Defense Fund 2007; Ellickson & McGuigan 2000). Driving factors include poverty (Children's Defense Fund 2007), lower performing schools (Fields & McNamara 2001), family status factors such as growing up in a single-parent household (Hawkins et al. 2000), lower quality health care and increased need for mental health services (Children's Defense Fund 2007), community factors related to levels of neighbourhood disorganisation and availability of drugs and firearms (Hawkins et al. 2000), as well as racial factors with youth of colour being more likely to be involved in violence (Children's Defense Fund 2007). In addition, research suggests that the likelihood of perpetrating violence and being a victim of violence is increased by the same factors (Malik, Sorenson & Aneshensel 1997). Overall, the literature supports the understanding that factors compound on the individual youth to create a situation of being at risk for violence.

The traditional response to youth violence is one that has been directed by police and juvenile justice (Fields & McNamara 2001). With the economic downturn, funding has been increasingly moved from preventive efforts into enforcement efforts (Lee-Davis, Kaczorowski & Yale 2008). As belts have tightened, budgets for recreation, youth services and expenditure on youth in general have decreased, while funding for law enforcement has increased. While the outcry from a public uneasy with gangs, increasing murder rates and prevalence of drug trafficking often does land on law enforcement's purview, decreasing funding for preventive measures and healthy outlets for youth inevitably leads to a downward spiral of deficit-based approaches and denies knowledge gained from asset-based understandings (Fisher & Harding 2008; Kretzman & McKnight 1993; McKnight & Block 2010).

The escalating violence and diminishing preventive budgets have resulted in a resurgence of efforts aimed at community building to address violence (Hawkins et al. 2000). Such

community-building efforts are aimed at youth engagement and empowerment using an asset-based approach (McKnight & Block 2010). Driving this renewed interest is the growing belief in the need for comprehensive strategies to deal with community violence directed at and by adolescents (McCart et al. 2007). As a profession, social work is well positioned to help construct this kind of integrative community practice intervention (Mannes, Roehlkepartain & Benson 2005). Social work is oriented towards asset-based approaches to community capacity building (Austin 2005; Cnaan & Rothman 2008). As such, community efforts need to be well planned and targeted using proven community capacity-building strategies such as public forums and focus groups (Mathie & Cunningham 2008; Nissen, Merrigan & Kraft 2005).

Service-Learning

The benefits of service-learning for students, educators and the community have been well documented (Holland 2003; Watkins & Braun 2005). In large part these benefits have been noted due to the dynamic learning opportunities that service presents (Underwood et al. 2000). Dynamic, as learning in these contexts is a social activity. As a social activity, service-learning has been shown to help build a sense of citizenship (Morgan & Streb 2001; Perry & Katula 2001) and civic engagement (Astin & Sax 1998). In this way the integration of learning is fostered as the student processes the exchange in the community through the structure of the coursework and assignments (Cooks & Scharrer 2006; Timm, Birkenmaier & Tebb 2011). Meaning is made and constructed by the students in the relationships and context of the service.

For students, the learning opportunities presented by the hands-on experiences encourage and foster active learning (Johnson 2001; Watkins & Braun 2005). Specifically for social work students, service-learning presents a real-life situation to increase self-awareness of biases, prejudices and stereotypes (Boyle-Baise 2002; Flannery & Ward 1999). Learning now comes from experience, which can only enhance learning from text books and classroom knowledge building. In this way the experience helps the student to construct meaning in a social environment (Hacking 1999). In a closely related and expanded way, the link to promoting learning related to social justice through service-learning has been well established (Adams 1997; Boyle-Baise 2002; Timm, Birkenmaier & Tebb 2011). Through the pedagogical approach of service-learning the student can make meaning and have direct access to the compounding factors/forces that hold back social justice in our society. In fact service-learning has been shown to promote a longer term sense of civic engagement than other, more traditional learning approaches (Kirlin 2001). Thematically, the social justice building blocks of equality, participation, racial and economic justice become real and assessable when community-based service-learning is well constructed (Boyle-Baise & Langford 2004; Timm, Birkenmaier & Tebb 2011).

The opportunities for educators are no less profound through the use of service-learning. Teaching via service-learning becomes an integrated activity (Bloomgarden & O'Meara 2007). It moves the faculty in line with the oft-quoted description of teaching as 'lighting a fire, not filling a bucket'. The faculty is now in position to actualise course objectives in a tangible way and present opportunity for real skill acquisition (Bloomgarden & O'Meara 2007). In addition to the teaching integration, service-learning provides the potential for a more seamless integration of research and teaching (Brew & Boud 1995; Colbeck, 1998).

Increasingly, higher education institutions have become interested in the role they play in the community (LaValle 2009). Through the action and activity of service-learning, the college/university becomes a participant in the community (Underwood et al. 2000). The institution becomes a collaborator, a partner, and in doing so must negotiate how to 'do with, not to' the community. This is predicated on the institution understanding that partnerships take time for the trust to develop and that sustained efforts produce much stronger results than episodic service-learning efforts (Holland 2003).

In summary, while there is clear movement towards the use of service-learning to deliver course content, more evidence is needed to demonstrate that this is a high-impact best practice (Dooley, Sellers & Gordon-Hempe 2009). Additionally, fidelity to the principles of service-learning in course and service construction is essential to move towards service-learning being seen as an evidence-based educational practice (Watkins & Braun 2005). Specifically, that there is real collaboration between the educational system (in this case the course) and the community partners, that the faculty openly demonstrates reciprocity as evidenced by more fluid teacher-learner roles, that learning be guided by well-constructed reflection assignments, and that the service be meaningful action that encourages civic responsibility (Watkins & Braun 2005). Finally, without question, teaching using service-learning means that many things are outside the control of the faculty. As such, the faculty needs to both prepare for the unexpected and be ready to be flexible in the academic setting of the course in ways that generally do not come up when performing solely classroom-based instruction.

THE COMMUNITY LEARNING CONTEXT

This article describes the process and the empirical results stemming from graduate social work course-related, service-learning interventions. The setting of the service was a mid-sized northeastern United States urban community. The actual partnership involved a graduate social work program and a historically African-American church. The college–church collaboration was formed to address social justice needs (Boyle-Baise & Langford 2004), both of the community and of the service delivery system (Steves & Blevins 2005). A major objective of the

partnership was to push for reform of critical community practices that deprived the community of safety (Kinnevy & Broddie 2001). These practices related to ideas about community–police relationships and the code of the street culture that seemed to be specifically played out in violence committed by and against youth (Lee-Davis, Kaczorowski & Yale 2008), the result of which was a grassroots social justice, community capacity-building effort known as 'You Bet I Told'.

The 'You Bet I Told' partnership began through outreach to the church from the social work department following a rash of six murders of youth under the age of 18 over a 10-day period in the fall of 2005 and has grown from that point. The partnership, with its successes and challenges, has most certainly been a living classroom for the MSW students and faculty that have been involved and an initiative that directly reflects how social workers can live out the profession's mission related to social justice and community practice (Adams 1997). Briefly, the Ethical Principles of the NASW Code of Ethics directs that social workers provide service, work for social justice, and promote the dignity and worth of every person (1997). These are tall orders and a challenge for social work educators to make these principles come to life in real educational experiences (Underwood et al. 2000).

This article pertains to the activities conducted in the third year of the project. The third year began with a billboard campaign to address the 'no snitch' rule of the streets in a city that had led its state in the per capita murder rate for four of the past five years. As is the case in many cities, a sizeable portion of the murders involved youth as perpetrator, victim, or both. As a community capacity-building exercise related to the 'You Bet I Told' campaign, two public forums were held in early 2008. The goal of the forums was to provide an opportunity to build relationships between community members and law enforcement officials to address the culture of 'no snitch' that had hampered both law enforcement efforts and a sense of safety in the community (Hawkins et al. 2000). The events allowed parts of the community disempowered by fear and lack of trust in the community safety mechanisms to partner with law enforcement to begin to more fully use community assets to address crime (Ellickson & McGuigan 2000; McKnight & Block 2010). The planning for, running of, and post-event reporting to the community was carried out by the service-learning students. The two events used a community capacity-building model as the central framework (Cnaan & Rothman 2008; McKnight & Block 2010). Community capacity-building approaches focus on empowering citizens through democratic processes to become engaged in the issues that are pertinent to them (McKnight & Block 2010).

The first event was held at an African Methodist Episcopal Church as a public community forum. The service-learning students performed a number of roles at the event. They greeted and registered the community and officials and assisted in the

serving of a community dinner prepared by the church before the formal forum. They were stationed at each of the three public microphones as both scribes and 'bell-ringers' as each speaker was kept to a time limit; they scribed the whole evening which was projected onto a large screen in real time; and they conducted and collected the exit surveys. The second public forum was held at a nightclub at dinner time. The club was chosen as a way to attract more youth. The club is one of the few clubs that produce larger scale urban music on a regular basis, and it donated the space, microphones, projection screens and soft drinks as a goodwill gesture to the community. Again, the service-learning students had a similar array of roles and functions.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course described in this article is a graduate social work macro practice (methods) class. The course was developed to deliver specific Council on Social Work Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards' (EPAS) competencies. There were seven course objectives for this course. While parts of each objective did fit this semester-long assignment, four stood out as particularly important to demonstrate:

—Demonstrate knowledge of generalist practice and its application to developing empowering interventions with communities through a collaborative mutual process with social and economic justice as a primary focal point

—Demonstrate a depth oriented level of understanding related to cross-cultural and human diversity issues related to populations at risk

—Demonstrate a comfort with the range of social work roles in generalist practice including conferee, enabler, broker, advocate and mediator

—Demonstrate effective application of the problem-solving process: problem identification, assessment, goal setting, intervention, termination and evaluation.

Clearly these are all essential learning objectives for master's level social workers and difficult to achieve, especially when using only a traditional education approach.

METHOD

This research employed a concurrent mixed-method, integrating post-hoc design (Creswell 2009). Mixed-method designs have proven to provide a rich illumination of practice-related data (Anastas 2004). Assessment used two related data sets, the empirical analysis of qualitative data from student reflection papers, and the quantitative analysis of course evaluations from the combined two sections of the advanced macro practice course, which was compared to the course evaluation data from the two prior years that had not had a service learning component. Analysis of the student work was run through the college's Institutional Review Board and deemed as 'exempt'.

The qualitative methodology used a grounded theory approach consistent with the structure outlined by Glaser & Strauss (1967). As the analysis of the student papers reflected on their real-world experience, the data was embedded in that context (Anastas 2004). Student papers were hand coded in a mapping process (Harry, Struges & Klinger 2005). The process of the analysis used a structure of open coding, followed by categorical grouping of data, followed by theme-level bucketing and finally interpretation of results (Harry, Struges & Klinger 2005). Students completed a lengthy reflective assignment which asked them to follow a praxis model of first describing what they had experienced and done to facilitate the community capacity building to address youth violence, second to reflect using the four course objectives discussed earlier in this article as anchor points, and third to integrate and say how the experience and reflection had developed their own social work practice skills.

For the quantitative analysis, all students completed an IDEA (Instructional Development and Evaluation Assessment) diagnostic course evaluation. The IDEA was administered at the end of the course with the instructor not present in the room and sent outside the institution for statistical analysis. The results were then returned to the institution and the instructor. Many academic institutions use such a service for course evaluation. Prior to the student course evaluation, the instructor selected five learning objectives as relevant. Four rated as 'important': (a) learning fundamental principles, generalisations or theories; (b) acquiring skills in working with others as a member of a team; (c) developing a clear understanding of and commitment to personal values; and (d) learning to analyse and critically evaluate ideas. One was rated as 'essential': learning to apply course material. Scores on this IDEA data from the 25 students enrolled in the service-learning course were compared to the similar scores from the 48 students who took the same course with the same instructor in the two previous years, but who did not undertake a service-learning component. The data was analysed using an SPSS program. As the students were not randomly assigned, the design for this group comparison methodological approach must be considered quasi-experimental (Creswell 2009).

RESULTS

Qualitative Analysis of Student Reflective Papers

Copies of the student papers were kept by the author. Papers had been originally submitted without names attached using a number code for later identification purposes. Using a random number draw, 10 of the papers (approximately 40 per cent of the total) were selected for a qualitative review for the purpose of this article. The reflective assignment papers first went through an open coding and then a categorical coding (Harry, Struges & Klinger 2005). The third pass through the data bucketed the data into five distinct themes: macro practice as a social justice vehicle; empowerment/

accessing power as an outcome of macro practice; diversity and ethics; a sense of integration/coming together of knowledge; and the value of service-learning as an educational approach.

Developing empowering interventions with communities. Appreciating the complexity of social justice in a macro context appeared to be a challenge many students had not previously integrated into their learning. The students (and these were graduate students) came to reflect on macro practice almost as if they had never really considered community as a practice field before, and it seems to have been transformative. 'The project provided me with an opportunity to become aware of the community and think about how I could do something or practise social work with it.' 'I did learn about macro practice because I did it and it wasn't just a course, it was life.' 'I found myself at first being mad at the police, then I felt sorry for them that everyone was mad at them and then I saw that people and the police were actually talking to each other, that was when I knew that we were doing community work.' 'It was the mothers who had lost their kids to murder, it seemed like for the first time they got to talk and be heard.'

In a related way many students were struck by the events' ability to bring the people and the sources of power together. 'We brought potentially adversarial groups together (law enforcement, frustrated victims of crime and fearful citizens) and empowered them to be partners in change together.' 'The greatest piece I will take from this experience is knowing that the process of empowering people is more important than trying to quickly reach a conclusion.' 'From the youth I heard so clearly that they just want and need to have a sense of control in their lives, I think the forum gave them an opportunity to voice that.' Taken together, the students' reflections seem to be addressing an understanding that community change is a process that they can help to facilitate rather than something that they just 'do'.

Depth in cross-cultural issues with populations at risk. The role of diversity and ethics was brought to life for the service-learning students through live experience. 'We were able to get past the "let's be nice to each other and not step on each other's toes" thing and really connect.' 'I heard a perspective about being black that I just had not heard anyone ever say before and that shocked me and made me think about what I do as a social worker.' One job three students had was to ring a small bell to indicate that a speaker's time was up. What seemed to be an 'easy' job before the event proved to be challenging and illuminating: 'I knew I had to ring the bell for the white woman as I had for the black woman. The white woman was talking so slow but I knew the black woman was watching me to see if I was going to give her more time. I knew then that she thinks that she always has to watch for special treatment.' Since the formation of the social work profession, the ability to work cross-culturally has been a core practice skill; the service opportunity seemed to facilitate this learning.

Application of course objectives to learning. As this was an advanced practice course the ability of students to integrate knowledge was a critical outcome. Results of the analysis suggest that the service-learning experience did provide a vehicle for that integration. 'This course was different; I am still mulling the way everything comes together.' 'I just feel like I have a deeper understanding of how things are in the community, it is not just one thing or another. The kids that are getting killed are getting killed because all this stuff is compounding on them, their family and their neighborhood, everything.' 'I saw a community effort, not a private struggle; I think that is what is needed to address this challenge.' The challenge of teaching macro social work practice in a classroom is that the community is not in the classroom. It would seem that by bringing the students into the community and having them take on social work roles they were able to learn about community social work practice.

Service-learning as a pedagogical modality. Finally, there were a lot of data related to the method (service-learning) of the course. 'Learning about macro practice is difficult and usually kind of boring, but this was different, it got me involved.' 'This class was different, I exert a lot of energy in class, and this is the first time I think I received more than the energy I exerted.' 'This experience has sparked my interest in future community work.' 'This was really challenging, but that is the real world, I learned a lot by having things get messed up in a real way.' 'This type of learning was a benefit to me – even when it was frustrating, I was learning.' The student reflections point to a level of depth that was afforded by the service-learning activities.

Quantitative Analysis of IDEA Data

At the end of the course, students were given a formal student IDEA course evaluation form. This computerised form offers a list of 12 items that can be used as a basis for measuring student success in achieving course objectives. The instructor selected five items (out of 12) as relevant; as mentioned, four were deemed 'important': (1) learning fundamental principles, generalisations or theories; (2) acquiring skills in working with others as a member of a team; (3) developing a clear understanding of and commitment to personal values; and (4) learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas. The fifth item was considered 'essential': learning to apply course material. Students responded on a 5-point scale, with 1 relating to 'I made no apparent progress on this objective' to 5 meaning 'I made exceptional progress / I made outstanding gains on this objective'. The mean for the students who had a service-learning experience was 4.9 with a standard deviation of 0.137. The two prior years' IDEA data were combined. The mean for the two prior year classes without a service-learning experience was 4.25 with a standard deviation of 0.368. As the two prior years needed to be considered as potentially different groups, a one-way ANOVA was performed (Abu-Bader 2006). The difference, while not significant ($F=1.970$, $p=.089$), did show a strong trend towards a statistical

difference. Given the limited sample size, not achieving statistical significance is not unexpected and as such a p value of .089 can be read as powerful evidence of an effect (Abu-Bader 2006).

DISCUSSION

The 'You Bet I Told' project directly provided a structure that facilitated student learning through involvement in the community (Cooks & Scharrer 2006; Johnson 2001). One course objective asked that students 'demonstrate knowledge of generalist practice and its application to developing empowering interventions with communities through a collaborative mutual process with social and economic justice as a primary focal point'. The students were involved live with the process, they greeted the public officials and the concerned citizens, and they provided critical service related to the success of the community capacity-building efforts (McKnight & Block 2010). They met with mothers whose sons had been murdered and who were filled with anger at both the loss and their perceived lack of justice. By facilitating the process that brought disconnected aspects of the community together, the students learned how empowerment practice is actually done. The whole project was driven by community capacity-building approaches that asked the social worker to work to catalyse strengths in the community that had become buried by the compounding force of multiple factors (Kinnevy & Broddie 2001; McKnight & Block 2010); in this case factors associated with urban poverty. Analysis of student work and post-course evaluation demonstrate that the involvement in this community capacity-driven project translated into a substantial learning experience.

A second student learning outcome related to cross-cultural practice skills in the macro environment. Murder is disproportionately affecting youth of colour (Kovandzic, Vieraitis & Yeisley 1998; Martinez 1996) and therefore the students (who were largely Caucasian and middle class) needed to engage and connect across multiple diversity lines. The structure of the service-learning seems to have facilitated this critical skill acquisition. There was a real sense of partnership between the community and the college. The community leaders wrote several letters to the college president thanking the school for the work of the students. The students and the faculty involved all learned from the community, reflecting a real sense of reciprocity. In their reflection papers the students directly commented on their own growth and deepening of understanding. The problem of murder and youth violence is real, and the students and the faculty were struck by the fact that they were doing something meaningful, hopefully life altering, in the community. In addition, the students gained skills in how to form and maintain partnerships with community providers, in this case a historically African-American church (Lough 1999). Increasingly there is evidence that partnerships with religious organisations are an under-utilised community asset, and as such the students' on-going involvement provided learning on how to set up and maintain such a partnership (Holland 2003).

The third essential course learning objective required that the students gain proficiency and familiarity in a number of essential social work roles. Through the multitude of real tasks that the service required, the students gained live experience in a variety of roles. Specifically, they brokered a conversation between groups of people who were disconnected (mothers of murdered children and law enforcement), they helped to create an advocacy platform to address social justice shortcomings related to homicide, and they learned to enable a grassroots democratic process.

The fourth essential course objective was to engage in the problem-solving process. The ability to promote the capacity of a community is an important professional skill set for social workers in today's world (Ehrlich 2000). It is also a skill set that most students need to practise to bring textbook concepts to a real state of understanding. The service-learning experience not only provided the students with live learning of strategies to build community but also to be a part of the democratic process (McKnight & Block 2010; Porter et al. 2008). Later they used service-learning reflective assignments to process and integrate learning gained from the experience (Watkins & Braun 2005). In particular, the students were able to work with and reflect upon the community of youth who are deemed 'high risk'. This is a historic population for whom social workers need to have competency in community practice skills (Kinnevy & Broddie 2001).

For service-learning to be effective, a solid community-college partnership is vital (Holland 2003; Timm, Birkenmaier & Tebb 2011). A core value of this partnership that has been brought to the table by the faculty involved in this project has been a commitment to community capacity building and strengthening (Porter et al. 2008). The students facilitated virtually every aspect of the forums, including the transcription of the events. The faculty then used the transcriptions to form five key recommendations that were presented to the Mayor, the County Executive and the leaders of law enforcement including the District Attorney and the Chief of Police. In this way, as an organic grassroots-driven community initiative, graduate MSW students participated in, facilitated and ultimately learned how to promote community capacity building by empowering the voice of citizens in relation to the structures of community power.

The other 'learner' in the whole process is the faculty member, and like most service-learning course experiences this project provided ample opportunity for learning. As with many forms of learning, some of the learning is born from frustration and some from pride in accomplishment. Welch (2009) talks about a 'knock on the door' that opens up an opportunity. This project was full of opportunity. One challenge was meeting all those opportunities. This relates to the extra time it takes to run a good service-learning course. Without question, time that would not be spent in typical classroom-based instruction is demanded of the faculty. To be engaged in the community, one must go into the community, sit with people, hear their perspective, make

relationships and accommodate their needs. The project took place in a church. The church had needs and requests. The project involved community leaders, each with a schedule and a set of needs. It was important to have the press on board, and getting the press to cover an event takes planning and knowing how to frame a press release so they will come. Most helpful is for the faculty to consciously assume a civilly engaged scholar identity (Liese 2009). This means that time needs to be spent considering how to translate concepts such as democracy or stewardship into action. For this project it became essential for the faculty to define and stress to the students these core concepts. Additionally it was necessary for the faculty to learn to talk this talk with the community leaders so that all could be relatively on the same page with the potential objectives of the project. Ultimately the extra labour paid off in learning for the faculty as the work was meaningful, and this helped the faculty gain a greater sense of meaning in the academic experience (Diener 2009).

In many service-learning opportunities the ability to arrange the learning in a public context is essential. Learning as a social activity is powerful (Underwood et al. 2000). This is especially true when the learning is meaningful. As this project placed the students in the middle of a community conversation related to murder of youth and community/police relations, the level of meaning was high and this seemed to spark student learning. Learning was facilitated by the access to the populations impacted by the core issues on both sides. The access to the critical actors provided the opportunity for the social work students to construct knowledge in a social exchange that actually happened (Cooks & Scharrer 2006). The students met and mingled with both the citizens affected and the power brokers in the community. In these roles the students helped to make bridges, building social capital (Austin 2005). Key attention was paid to constructing community activities that were well planned in order to build community capacity, and as the students were intimately involved in the planning, these community capacity-building skills were taught as well (Nissen, Merrigan & Kraft 2005; Timm, Birkenmaier & Tebb 2011).

With regard to specific outcomes, the students were able to learn about building community to support high-risk youth (Mannes, Roehlkepartain & Benson 2005). As the community was struggling with issues of social justice and disempowerment of youth, the students were situated in a position where they could both facilitate horizontal linkages with other youth and vertical linkages to power structures including the Mayor, Chief of Police and District Attorney. As such there was an opportunity for holistic and comprehensive integration (Steves & Blevins 2005) for the students, as well as a comprehensive community response for the at-risk youth and families (McCart et al. 2007).

Limitations to the Course Outcome Ratings

A note of caution needs to be given when considering this post-hoc mixed-method analysis. There are numerous ways in which historical factors could have influenced the course outcome ratings (Rubin & Babbie 2005). For instance, the instructor reasonably could have gained teaching skills between the prior years' courses and the service-learning enhanced course, which would have translated into improved IDEA scores. There are student variables, too, as the student groups are unique; for instance, the service-learning student group could have been stronger or a better fit for a service-learning approach, or the relatively small sample size could have been overly influenced by a particularly passionate student. In a similar way, doing a qualitative review of student work invites bias as presumably the students are motivated to get good grades and may try to tell the instructor what they think the instructor wants to hear (Rubin & Babbie 2005). Collectively these concerns need to be taken into account when considering these results.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Macro intervention method coursework does present a challenge to the instructor. The depth, breath, richness and complexity of community are hard to capture in a text or in classroom activities (Cooks & Scharrer 2006). Increasingly, across the country, institutions of higher learning are coming to value service to the community and an engaged campus-community model (Bloomgarden & O'Meara 2007). For academia the use of service-learning opens the door for significant learning opportunities for student, faculty and community (Liese 2009). For this project the students were able to demonstrate that they had mastered key course objectives, as seen in both the analysis of their work and in the course evaluation scores. Specifically, students were able to talk about feeling more connected to the community and the democratic process. Importantly, this is vital learning that the faculty also gained (Diener 2009). The project set out to explore ways to improve the sense of social justice in participants, and the service did appear to enable two distinct groups – those affected by violence, and law enforcement – to come together and hear each other out, with the promise of working together to increase social justice in urban environments. In a related way the service provided by the class brought diverse groups together, providing a platform for the students to see how to develop skills related to diversity work. Finally the service and the raw nature of murder offered numerous ethical considerations for learning.

The implication of this work from the results of this post-hoc review is that it adds strength to the use of service-learning as a high-impact educational practice (Kuh 2010), especially in terms of delivering course content in social work macro practice courses. Clearly, service-learning is labour intensive and not as 'clean' as

classroom only instruction, but the reward is enhanced learning for student and faculty while making a meaningful contribution to the community.

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